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ABSTRACT

Although the writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) movement has grown to be one of the most successful education reform movements in the United States, long-term strategies for sustaining WAC programs are needed and they must include recognizing and using context as a survival tool. Writing across the Business Disciplines (WABD) was started at Robert Morris College (RMC) under a grant from the Buhl foundation. The bureaucracy of universities and colleges (including RMC) can provide: a campus-wide forum to discuss writing across the curriculum and to spread the good word about it; a departmental structure into which WAC programs can be woven; and a reward system to encourage participation. Evaluation may be the best way to justify budget outlays for WAC programs. The evaluation of RMC's program was extensive and successful enough to get additional commitments from the administration to continue the program. Communication is another way to attach WAC programs to the institution. The experience at RMC demonstrated that where communication was clear and open, the program flourished; where communication was weak and closed, WABD had difficulty. Accurate record-keeping and histories are another way to bridge the gap between WAC programs and their context. Accurate record-keeping provides the documentation necessary to construct histories that may be crucial to the continuation of programs. The only way WAC programs can survive is to better attach them to their own contexts. (Eighteen references are attached.) (RS)

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RECOGNIZING AND USING CONTEXT AS A SURVIVAL TOOL FOR WAC

"As quiltmakers remind us, reconsideration of existing materials generates new ideas and images."

-Ann Ruggles Gere. "Greetings," *1992 CCCC Program. Contexts, Convention Program, Communities and Constraints: Sites of Composing and Communicating.* 4.

Over the last fifteen years, the writing-across-the-curriculum movement has grown to be one of the most successful education reform movements in the United States. Carol Hartzog found that 41% of the schools surveyed in her 1986 book, *Composition and the Academy: A Study of Writing Program Administration* have instituted WAC programs. Susan McLeod, in her 1989 WAC survey, "Writing Across the Curriculum: The Second Stage and Beyond," found that 38 % of the

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colleges and universities responding had WAC programs and another 10% were in the planning stages, hoping to implement programs in the near future. McLeod points out how startling these figures are, "considering just a decade ago, only a handful of such programs existed" (338). Cynthia Cornell and David Klooster affirm in a recent *WPA* article that "In terms of numbers of participating institutions, the WAC movement has never been stronger." More currently, the February 19, 1992, WAC Videoconference, "Writing Across the Curriculum: Making it Work," the second sponsored by PBS and my home institution, Robert Morris College, is receiving enthusiastic response from viewers across the country. My Dean, Bill Sipple, estimates that the almost 200 downlink sights in the United States and Canada, allowed about 10,000 people to participate. Such numbers qualify it as among the largest conferences produced for PBS Adult Learning Services. One surprising aspect of the videoconference participation was the level of sophistication of the call-in questions: no longer were viewers asking questions about what WAC is and whether all that paper work needed to be graded. Rather, Sipple noted, their concerns centered around such issues as how to most effectively structure assignments to achieve cognitive goals in specific disciplines, an issue raised by Lee Odell some ten years ago as under-examined yet crucial to WAC research (Odell 43).

Writing Across the Curriculum has succeeded because it looks like a very positive addition to the ability of colleges and universities to improve the classroom experience for their students. WAC, in its various emphases, continues to offer, much hope: improved literacy, improved thinking and learning about subjects across the disciplines, increased interest in writing in the disciplines, and an increased emphasis on improved teaching: several experts at both RMC/PBS videoconferences referred to pedagogical power of WAC. At the February 1992

broadcast, Elaine Maimon called the present movement, "the reform pedagogy."

But it remains true, as James Kinneavy wrote in 1987, "the jury is still out on writing across the curriculum.... Further cases must be brought to the courts to test the movement" (377). One of the chief things the jury is still deciding is the concern of this panel also: the future and durability of WAC. Perhaps the most pressing question the movement faces is how WAC programs can be kept going. Indeed, disturbing reports concerning the viability of the movement are appearing in the literature: Cornell and Klooster warn that continuation of writing-across-the-curriculum programs is threatened, a warning all that more ominous since the researchers single out older and therefore, presumably, more successful programs. "On many campuses where writing program have existed for a decade or more, the willingness of faculty to share responsibility for writing is waning, and administrative agenda are shifting to other issues. On such campuses writing across the curriculum is struggling for survival." The authors suggest such programs conflict with inaccurate assumptions concerning the educational process (8). Among those assumptions: WAC is temporary, WAC courses are no more work to teach than traditional courses, and WAC is cheap.

These authors also point out a different category of threats to writing across the curriculum, which they refer to as "conflicts among competing priorities" (12). One of these are the conflict between the commitment to the department and discipline vs. the commitment to the writing program; another is the goals of a successful writing program vs. the goals of effective academic administration. In a 1989 CCCC paper Richard Young analyzed this incompatibility, suggesting that successful writing programs require teachers to assign writing frequently, give appropriate feedback, reinforce developing abilities, present a variety of genres and audiences for writing, and a demonstrate to students the importance of writing. Effective administration, on the other hand, requires that programs not additionally burden the faculty nor the budget.

Davis Russell sees a similar and basic incompatibility between universities and WAC programs. He argues that attitudes and organizational structures threaten the very existence of WAC.

> By conservative estimate, tens of thousands of faculty, students, and administrators at hundreds of institutions have been exposed to the movement, and many have made it an important part of their work. Yet the same attitudes and organizational structures that ended or marginalized earlier reforms continue to place large, often insurmountable obstacles in the way of current efforts to make writing a central part of American education (Russell 292).

These problems are further compounded by the gradual drying up of the grant money that was used to implement and sustain many programs (Russell 291). In light of these reports, Cornell and Klooster's warning seems ominous and accurate: "[A]ll but the most committed institutions will experience tensions that can threaten the existence of ambitious writing programs" (14).

How can we keep WAC programs going? As the Director of the Robert Morris Writing-Across-the-Business-Disciplines program, I have been entrusted with the care of an eight-year old program that was called by an outside WPA evaluation team one of the best writing across the curriculum programs in the country (Arkin et al). My in-depth study of this program allowed me to closely examine what happened in the RMC WABD program and what can be learned from the Robert Morris experience that can be helpful to others attempting to implement and sustain WAC programs.

My argument today is that the long-term strategies for sustaining WAC programs must include, as the name of the 1992 CCCC suggests, the recognizing and using the context as a survival tool for WAC. Richard Young and others are correct in pointing out that the school contexts of WAC are often at odds with the programs. But these contexts are also places we can look for the means to help WAC survive. I will use context as Ann Ruggles Gere, the 1992 CCCC Program

Chair, does in her Greetings in the *Convention Program*, "As quiltmakers reminds us, reconsideration of existing materials generates new ideas and images" (4). Rather than always looking outside the institution, for grant money, for example, we can reconsider and better use the existing structures the college or university has already provided to help assure the longevity our programs need and deserve. My suggested use of context is a variation of David Russell's argument that, to survive, WAC programs must be more strongly woven into the fabric of our institutions. Russell suggests that if WAC programs are not integrated into the organizational structure of the college or university, the programs will die out as soon as the powerful personalities that started them leave. To do this weaving, we must find ways in which our "reconsideration of existing materials generates new ideas and images." My analysis of the Robert Morris story attempts to do just that.

Writing Across the Business Disciplines (WABD) was started at Robert Morris under a grant from the Buhl Foundation that provided the resources for a series of faculty seminars where RMC faculty from across the curriculum studied ways to integrate writing to learn into their individual targeted courses. Each iteration consisted of approximately twelve faculty, so that within four years, more than one-third of the faculty had been cycled thorough the seminars. As the outside grant money dwindled, seminars became economically impossible. The central question of the program became: how can more faculty be attracted and trained and how can interest be maintained among those who who have already been through the program now that the grant-supported seminars are gone?

The answer came in the form of the departmental-level replacement for the faculty seminars known as the "Mentor phase" of WABD. My examination of this new system suggests several ways to help programs survive by exploiting the contexts in which the programs began, including the following: attachment of programs to the bureaucracy of the school, extensive evaluation of programs,

communication, record keeping, and histories.

The Attachment of Programs to Schools Bureaucracy

The bureaucracy of a college or university can prove a rich area to mine for ways to help WAC programs survive. For example, universities and college bureaucracies can provide: 1. a campus-wide forum to discuss writing across the curriculum and to spread the good word about it, 2. a departmental structure into which WAC programs can be woven, and 3. a reward system to encourage participation. These possibilities have become reality at RMC.

1. Campus-wide Forums are necessary intellectual arenas where WAC can be discussed and studied. College and university institutions can easily provide such forums for WAC through the existing committee structure, a well- (some might say too well) accepted part of a school context. A WAC committee can get increased support from all parts of the college community as well as provide information for the whole faculty and administration. The Robert Morris WABD Advisory Committee is charged with furthering and strengthening the program throughout the College. The Committee's principle focus has been the design and implementation of faculty seminars that will interest new and past WABD participants in the possibilities of writing across the curriculum, especially the application of the WABD approach by new participants to courses they teach. Last year (1991-92), the RMC WABD Advisory Committee held five faculty seminars where about 15 Robert Morris faculty from across the disciplines made presentations, chiefly on their application of WABD to a targeted course.

Membership on such committees should not be entirely voluntary; certain people should be strongly encouraged to join and remain permanent members.

Among those holding ex-officio membership on the RMC WABD Advisory Committee are the following: two members of the board of Trustees, the Academic Vice-President, two students, on a rotating basis, who have participated in WABD-targeted classes, and all faculty mentors. The other members are made up of interested parties. (Faculty who have participated in the program, apply, and, so far without exception, are accepted). Such a membership list ensures budget and decision makers are participating along with faculty, allowing us all to gain an increased sense of ownership of the program. Membership on campus-wide WAC Committees teach and remind administrators of the importance of these programs to improved literacy, leaning, and teaching. Such membership also teaches and reminds administrators of the difficulties of keeping such programs going. Faculty also can benefit from rethinking and relearning these lessons. A note on the importance of planning: both the the Advisory Committee and the departmental status of the program were provided for in the original grant proposal.

2. Under the new system, a new participant chooses a member of her department who has been through the program and uses that person as a resource to help the neophyte complete a series of four videos and accompanying work books. Criteria for faculty training in the program remains the same: completion of a full-course plan that exhibits a reenvisioning of an individually targeted course starting with the course goals and including opportunities for writing-to-learn tasks. As well as exploiting the already-existing departmental structure, the Mentor approach benefits from the collegiality of faculty working with other faculty on the departmental/disciplinary level.

Another way a WAC program can make use of a school's bureaucratic context is by getting department status for the the program. As Russell and others have pointed out, departmental structure is perhaps the most powerful

organizational principle of the modern university. It is also a principle which, by its very nature, often works against writing across the curriculum. The Robert Morris experience shows that sustainability for WAC lies in joining, rather than fighting this organizational context. Writing Across the Business Disciplines at RMC is a department with its own budget; the Director reports directly to the Vice-President for Academic Affairs. Such a system gives the programs some permanence and financial consideration at budget times. Also, directors may become privy to administrative meetings, those for department heads, for example, which can make them aware of intra- and inter-departmental administrative concerns that should be taken into consideration when planning WAC program activities.

3) Writing Across the Business Disciplines has been able to attach itself to the reward structure of the college. Originally, stipends were paid to WABD participants. In an interview with the RMC President, I found that, although he was very willing to continue stipends, he was unenthusiastic about paying stipends for WABD participation and considering such participation as grounds for merit pay under the new RMC-AFT labor agreement. In my next WABD budget, I suggested all stipends for participation be discontinued. As the President pointed out, a one per cent raise in a faculty member's base pay amounts to much more in ten years (or even two years) than the average $300 stipend being paid just prior to the change. Aside from financially benefiting faculty, connecting participation to merit pay further attaches the program to the College by tying it to the merit reward structure of the school, another familiar context to most faculty, even those unionized. As well as helping weave WAC into the fabric of the institution, a merit reward system also helps insure commitment of faculty to complete the program, especially since merit pay decisions are more clearly attached to firmer deadlines (in our case, the submission in early April of the Professional Development Report which is the basis for merit consideration). Reward has been

and will be a powerful part of our working context. It can help us sustain programs.

Evaluation of WAC Programs

Evaluation is another way of using context to keep WAC programs going. Such evaluation may be the best way to justify budgetary outlays for WAC programs. The first Director or WABD, Jo-Ann Sipple, and the outside advisor, Richard Young, began an elaborate multi-measured evaluation process while they were still under the budget for the first grant. Convinced, the Buhl Foundation awarded the program a supplementary grant to carry out the whole proposed evaluation plan. The entire evaluation consisted of inside and outside evaluation of teachers' and students' attitudes and practices, and of the program as a whole. The evaluation was extensive and successful enough to get additional commitments from the RMC administration to continue the program for another four years. (Up to and including next year.)

Possibilities to implement evaluation exist within any institution. It is part of what teachers do. Every faculty participant in WABD has been responsible for evaluation plans for their own targeted courses. The plans are as rich and varied as the faculty itself. If faculty or programs directors need help with larger scope evaluation, specialists in statistics and other quantitative and qualitative approaches can be found on any campus.

Communication

Communication among all parts of the school is another way to attach WAC programs to the institution. Good communication about WAC programs with all parts of the university or college community increases a sense of

participation and ownership of programs. Such communication possibilities abound in the context of our institutional environment: printed or copied announcements of upcoming faculty seminars are less powerful at Robert Morris than individually directed memos; committee newsletter reports on seminar and committee actions and plans let faculty believe that WAC is their program. Sometimes even the most obvious tools of communication are overlooked. Letters to new faculty, thank-you notes for faculty presentations, voice mail reminders of up coming meetings (the technology makes this easy if targeting just participants rather than blanketing the whole faculty), and follow-up memos after faculty conferences are just some examples of this communication that I recently started using and I believe have helped our program.

The whole of our RMC experience has taught me that where communication has been clear and open, the program flourished; where communication was weak and closed, WABD had difficulty. The original Director and outside advisor, Sipple and Young, achieved much initial success for the program through early and full disclosure of information. Memos and letters show that in the earliest stages of the planning, the administration knew step-by-step what was happening concerning the grant proposal and were sometimes asked to participate in its preparation. Additionally, the advantages for and responsibilities of faculty who wished to participate in WABD were thoroughly advertised to all faculty well before the program began. Jim Vincent, President of the RMC faculty union, RMC-AFT local 3412, attributes the lack of any labor trouble concerning the program to the fact that the union leadership was thoroughly informed of the plans of WABD. The materials for such communication are all around us, their reconsidered, as Gere suggests above, "generates new ideas and images."

Although I have talked about faculty reward under a separate heading,

such reward can also be considered communication, because it sends a powerful, if indirect, communication to faculty defining how the administration values participation in WAC programs. In short, carefully though-out reward systems can create an inviting context to attract faculty and an incentive for faculty to finish the obligations of their participation.

Exploiting context for persuasive purposes is nothing new: My colleague, John O'Banion, reminds me that my emphasis on context is simply a recognition of the power of the ancient persuasive strategy, narratio. In his new book, *Reorienting Rhetoric: The Dialect of List and Story,* O'Banion points out that ancient rhetoric, especially as practiced by Quintilian and Cicero understood the power of the story, the narration, in orienting the audience and taking the peculiar circumstances of the case under consideration. One way to see my in-depth examination (and case histories in general) is as an argument by story, a narratio. Through the examination of one instantiation of WAC, we see how such programs become and remain reality on individual campuses and how WAC "is developing as an idea or set of ideas" (Hartzog 38). We also see the importance of context to WAC programs. O'Banion tells us that in classical times "contexts were understood as the frameworks within which particulars make sense. . . " (89). We can help the particulars of WAC programs make sense to administrators and faculty by connecting them better to the context of their environment.

Record Keeping and History

This brings me to my last means of bridging the gap between WAC programs and their context: record keeping and histories. Accurate record-keeping provides the documentation necessary to construct histories which may be crucial to the continuation of programs. Beginning with the earliest

plans for your program, save everything, in duplicate. Memos, letters, thank-you notes, announcements, proposals, and anything else that is part of the program can tell you or others what happened at a certain time and can be the basis of a history of the program that can be a coherent narrative that pulls all that documentation together, a framework within which the particulars of your program makes sense. Histories explain how programs interacted with their contexts, especially for future administrators and teachers. For example, they can remind future administrators of the theoretical basis of the program and show what practices have worked out and those that have not worked out in the past. Histories can also remind administrators of their commitments. In the large bureaucracies of colleges and universities, where decision making is limited to a few, often only that few know what happened to programs that were begun with great enthusiasm. It becomes easy to explain the demise of a program by saying that the program did what it was supposed to do, or that it outlived its usefulness, or that the program was just discontinued. Another of my colleagues, this one from the History Department pointed out as I started my study that without history there is only myth. I have come to believe that the more dangerous alternative is the loss of the past. Histories are an antidote to such institutional amnesia. In these histories, praise or blame may be assigned. With this knowledge and a growing tradition of keeping records and histories about such programs, administrators responsible for writing-across-the-curriculum programs may be more responsive and accountable to the programs and their own places in the histories of the programs.

This analysis is not intended to be exhaustive. This is the Robert Morris College, story , a narratio intimately connected to its own context. Through this story, I hope to have encouraged you all to come up with you own ideas to help your own programs by better attaching them to their own contexts. I believe it is the only way we can make these programs survive.

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